Economic & Political WEEKLY

A Matter of Definitions
Author(s): S. H. Deshpande
Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 17 (Apr. 27, 1991), p. 1120
Published by: Economic and Political Weekly
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4397997
Accessed: 31/10/2014 10:55

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

*Economic and Political Weekly* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Economic and Political Weekly*.

http://www.jstor.org

This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:55:53 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

# A Matter of Definitions

S H Deshpande

GOPAL GURU (*EPW*, February 16) comments disapprovingly on the attempts of 'Hindu communal forces' to 'Hinduise' Ambedkar for the "subsequent assimilation of dalits into Hindu fold". Guru's discussion is based on a fundamental misconception about the connotations of the terms 'Hinduism' and 'Hindutva'.

The term 'Hinduism' means the Hindu religion or, more properly, the Vedic or 'sanatana dharma'. 'Hindutva', on the other hand, means the quality or property of being a Hindu, i e, one who belongs to any of the several theological or philosophical sects born in India. Thus, 'Hindutva' embraces Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and members of all other indigenous schools of thought.

Surely the fountain-head of modern 'Hindutvawadi' thought is Savarkar and it is to him that commentators must turn to for enlightenment on this issue. Guru, predictably, shows no sign of having done this as is evident from the contents of his article as well as the notes at its end. If he were to look up only the first four pages of Savarkar's book *Hindutva* [1923] he would have found the following:

> Hindutva is not a word but a history. Not only the religious or spiritual history of our people as at times it is *mistaken to be by being confounded with the other cognate term Hinduism*... 'Hinduism' is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of Hindutva... Failure to distinguish between these two concepts has given rise to much misunderstanding... (emphasis supplied).

Here it is enough to point out that Hindutva is not identical with what is vaguely indicated by the term Hinduism.

By an 'ism' is generally meant a theory or code more or less based on spiritual or religious dogma or system. But when we attempt to investigate into the essential significance of Hindutva, *we do not primarily and certainly not mainly—concern ourselves with any particular theocratic or religious dogma or creed.*

> ...it is imperative to point out that we are by no means attempting a definition or even a description of the more limited, less satisfactory and *essentially sectarian term Hinduism* (emphasis supplied).

Savarkar was conscious that the word Hindutva was apt to be confused with 'Hinduism' or 'Hindu Dharma' and would have preferred a word less liable to be misunderstood. However, "Had not linguistic usage stood in our way, then 'Hinduness' would have been a better word than 'Hinduism' as a near parallel to Hindutva" [Savarkar 1923, p 4].

Thus, for Savarkar, Hindus are a people having a common religio-cultural heritage. Who are the contributors to this culture? He mentions Vedic seers, Dayanand, Jina, Mahaveera, Buddha, Nagasena, Nanak, Guru Govind, Banda, Basava, Chakradhara Ramadas, Rammohan (Roy) [Savarkar 1923, p 9].[1] It will be clearly seen from this list that it includes representatives of all the main sects or religions, Vedic or non-Vedic, ancient or modern.

This is Savarkar of 1923. I may be allowed to quote the post-1936 Savarkar who assumed the leadership of the Hindu Mahasabha until 1942. I content myself with only three brief excerpts.

> ...'Hindutva'—Hinduness—is more comprehensive than the word 'Hinduism'... Hinduism concerns (itself) with the religious systems of the Hindus, their theology and dogma. But this is precisely a matter which this Hindu Mahasabha leaves entirely to individual or group conscience or faith. The Mahasabha takes its stand on no dogma, no book or school of philosophy—whether pantheist, monotheist or atheist.
>
> The Hindu Mahasabha is not a Hindu Mission. It leaves religious questions regarding theism, monotheism, pantheism or even atheism to be discussed by the different Hindu schools of religious persuations. It is not a Hindu-Dharma Mahasabha, but a Hindu National Mahasabha.
>
> ...the Hindu Mahasabha is neither Orthodox nor Heterodox. In fact, it has very little to do with any 'doxy' at all [Savarkar 1949, pp 8, 111, 177].

Thus Savarkar's 'Hindu' can either be a Hindu in the narrow sense (i e, a 'sanatan dharmi' or Vedic) or a Jain, or a Buddhist or a Sikh or a member of any of the hundreds of religious denominations born in India. This is insofar as his formal definition of 'Hindu' is concerned. But according to his commentary on his own definition, a Hindu need not even be a believer in any one of the sects; Charvak, the atheist and materialist finds a place of honour among great Hindus of old mentioned by Savarkar [Gokhale 1983, p 26]. (It is well to remember in this context that personally Savarkar discarded all religions as equally useless. According to most scholars, he was at best an atheist, at worst an agnostic.)

In consequence Savarkar's 'Hindu Rashtra' is not a theocratic state. It is entirely secular [Savarkar 1949, pp 18, 67, 74, 103-10].

Latter-day 'Hindutvawadis' have not departed from this position. True, some statements of RSS leaders occasionally give the impression that they are wedded to the narrow Vedic creed [Deshpande 1989]; but their practice is the most telling proof of what their thinking on Hindutva is. Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists (and others) have never been excluded from the RSS. This is true of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (which has brought together on its platform 'dharmacharyas' representing all schools of thought). This is true of all 'Hindutvawadi' organisations.

Therefore, there is no question of anyone *attempting* to Hinduise Ambedkar. Ambedkar remains within the fold of 'Hindutva' as perceived by the 'Hindutvawadis', though not within the fold of Hinduism, as narrowly conceived.

In the light of the above, a look at the core statement of Guru would show the vacuousness of his reasoning. "Hence", Guru says, "the clubbing together of Savarkar and Ambedkar is wrong because while the former wanted to undermine caste but protect Hinduism thus interlocking himself in the contradiction the latter wanted to resolve this contradiction by eradicating caste and renouncing Hinduism" [Guru 1991]. Savarkar did not want to protect any 'Hinduism'; he wanted to protect Hindutva, the Hindu people. Thus the contradiction Guru speaks of is entirely of his own imagination. It will not be an exaggeration to say that if Ambedkar formally renounced Hinduism in 1956, Savarkar had done so much earlier, for all practical purposes, without embracing any other faith because he did not believe in any.

In one of his footnotes (no 8) Guru makes a reference to Yashwant Manohar who "criticised dalit intellectuals who are comparing Sawarkar with Ambedkar". Manohar's reasoning is the same as that of Guru and based on the same confusion. This has been carefully shown by More in his recent exhaustive article in *Manoos* [More 1991]. More also shows that there is no principal tenet of Ambedkar's 'Dhamma' which Savarkar would have taken exception to, given the latter's social radicalism and faith in rationalism.

## Note

1 See also p 78 on which are mentioned Rama, Krishna, Chaitanya, Madhava, Rodidas, Thiruwalluwar.

## References


Deshpande, S H, 'Sawarkar Praneet Hindutva Vicharacha Paramarthikanni Kelela Parabhave', ('Sawarkar's Hindutvawada Defeated by the Religionists'), *Mouj* (Marathi), Diwali Issue, November 1989.

Gokhale, D N, *Hindutva-Darshan* (Marathi), Suvichar Prakashan Mandal, Pune, 1983, p 26.

Guru Gopal, 'Hinduisation of Ambedkar in Maharashtra', *EPW*, February 16, 1991 p 340.

More, Sheshrao, 'Savarkar, Ambedkar ani Buddhadhamma', *Manoos* (Marathi), January-February 1991, pp 48-64.

Savarkar, V D, 'A Maratha' *Hindutva*, K V Kelkar, Nagpur, 1923.

—, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan* (a collection of the presidential speeches delivered from the Hindu Mahasabha platform), L G Khare, Bombay, 1949, p 8.

—, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, pp 18, 67, 74, 103-110.




This content downloaded from 202.41.10.30 on Fri, 31 Oct 2014 10:55:53 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions